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TREASURY FOR GENERAL COUNSEL/DAUFHAUSER AND DAS JZARATE
TREASURY ALSO FOR OFAC/RNEWCOMB AND TASK FORCE ON TERRORIST
FINANCING
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SUBJECT: NEPAL: CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

¶1. Summary: Continued Maoist violence in Nepal has taken a severe toll on the country's children, both physically and mentally. More than 100 have been killed during the course of the "People's War," and an estimated 1500 orphans and 15,000 displaced children face an uncertain future. Death or imprisonment of wage-earners, forced migration and the breakdown of social services has brought many families to the brink of starvation and forced young children to work outside the home or survive on the street. Throughout the country, destruction of health posts and other village facilities has deprived children of medical care and safe drinking water. There have been repeated reports of child rape, torture, imprisonment and injury, and child welfare workers anticipate that even after physical wounds have healed, the psychological effects of the insurgency's extreme violence will continue to have a disastrous influence on the next generation of leaders. End summary.

LARGE NUMBERS, SMALL VICTIMS

¶2. As the world observed this year's International Child Rights Day on November 20, a growing number of orphaned, injured, displaced and terrorized children in Nepal had little to celebrate. According to estimates by human rights NGOs, more than 1500 children have been orphaned in the ongoing Maoist insurgency and more than 15,000 have been displaced. More than 100 children have died in indiscriminate bombing attacks, have been brutally murdered by one side or the other, or have been killed in the crossfire between insurgents and security forces. Most of the children killed were aged 9 to 11.

¶3. The number of children otherwise affected by the insurgency is impossible to quantify, since the consequences of the violence are varied and far-reaching. Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), a local human rights group, has estimated that 100,000 children have been affected by the insurgency, and that 600,000 are "living in inhuman conditions." Other NGOs have refrained from citing a figure. "All of the children in Nepal are affected," said Gauri Pradhan, President of Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center (CWIN), "They're depressed, frustrated and scared. They see the Maoists come to school time and again with guns. They see violence and bloodshed all around. Even the children in [relatively safe] Kathmandu watching the television or reading the newspapers feel the insecurity."

¶4. It's small wonder that children are living in a state of tension and fear. Kathmandu newspapers contain a daily litany of violence, much of it against children, and much of it random. On November 8, a thirteen-year-old boy was killed when a bomb exploded as he was walking past a garbage dump, and another thirteen-year-old, accused of spying, was hacked to death by Maoists. On November 13, a fourteen-year-old was killed and a ten-year-old boy was seriously injured by a bomb as they walked along the highway. On November 14, a nine-year-old boy was killed by a bomb planted near his school.

¶5. Children living in the conflict zones have seen their parents, neighbors, friends, teachers and relatives killed in brutal fashion. Many have witnessed violent beatings and sexual assaults, or have been victims themselves. Though no reliable statistics have been collected on the number of children injured or assaulted in the conflict, CWIN has documented several cases of sex abuse of young girls involved with the Maoists, and the National Human Rights Commission has reported as an "illustration" an incident in which a young girl was gang-raped in front of her parents after they paid only 60,000 Nrs (770 USD) of the 100,000 Nrs (1280 USD) demanded by local insurgents.

ORPHANS AND DISPLACED CHILDREN:
TRAUMATIC PAST, UNCERTAIN FUTURE

16. Those children not injured or killed in the insurgency face other numerous hardships. Death of one or both parents has lowered an already poor standard of living for many children, and many have been forced to work outside the home or to fend for themselves on the streets. Government benefits for affected children are insufficient or nonexistent. In the case of army or police children, the services provide widows with one-time payments of up to 150,000 Nepali rupees (approx. 1900 USD), but most police widows have reported problems in receiving the benefits, especially in remote areas of the country.

17. The situation is worse for orphans whose parents were either suspected Maoists or simply innocent victims of random violence. CWIN's Pradhan said that under the last government, some families of civilian victims were able to obtain some compensation, but only if they belonged to the then-ruling Nepali Congress party and only if they had direct access to high-level officials in order to press their claims. Each district has a Child Welfare Committee, but the offices rarely have any funds these days. Some Chief District Officers have responded by collecting donations from passport applicants, assuming that anyone wealthy enough to travel abroad can spare some rupees for the district orphans. In most places, however, the children are left to fend for themselves. "If someone cares, that's nice," INSEC's Pyakurel stated with a resigned shrug. "But if not, [the orphans] become street children."

18. The number of homeless children and families is rising as migration to the perceived safety of Kathmandu or district headquarters increases and thousands of children leave their homes or families. In three surveyed districts, migration to the capital cities has doubled in the last two years. In Bardiya District more than 250 families of security personnel have been compelled to leave their homes due to Maoist threats, and similar tales have been reported in other areas of the country. In addition to the emotional trauma of displacement, the children face serious problems meeting their basic needs. Most displaced families were forced to leave behind the year's rice harvest, and many who have no friends or relatives to provide shelter are unable to afford nightly rates at town hotels. "We generally never had street families in Nepal," said CWIN's Gauri Pradhan, "but you can see them in all the towns now. It's definitely on the rise."

19. Increasing numbers of children are also being sent away from home by their parents to protect them from threatened abduction and forced recruitment by the Maoists. More than 200 young people in Sarlahi, Surkhet and Ilam have reportedly left their villages and settled in town centers after Maoists began visiting local families and demanding that parents deliver either monthly cash payments or their children. According to CWIN, reports that the Maoists will come to take one child per household, usually between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, are prevalent in most districts. Abductions of up to 170 children have been documented, lending credence to the claims. Villages have reported losing up to 95 percent of their population between the ages of 14 and 40 as a result of such rumors. Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, have interviewed a number of children who reported their forced abduction by the Maoists.

10. Unfortunately, the displaced children's situation can go from bad to worse, as they are often sent to live with relatives who can ill-afford to keep or to feed them. Many end up working as child laborers and all are vulnerable to a range of abuses. Many find their way to India for employment, or are sent there by their parents or relatives. CWIN and other NGOs have documented an increase in the number of child workers in towns that have experienced large influxes of displaced persons. One study in southern Siraha district revealed that children are the major full-time workforce in brick factories, cigarette factories, restaurants and hotels along the highway; and that the number of child domestic servants is increasing in several neighboring districts as well. NGOs also report that trafficking and sex abuse of children are on the rise in affected areas.

CHILD INFORMANTS: CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

11. Children in the conflict zones often are caught between the Maoists and security forces, and, on occasion, are used as informants by both sides. In one incident in northeastern Dolakha district, Maoists rounded up 200 children--the entire population of a primary school--at the beginning of the day, marched them to an unknown location in the jungle, and questioned them about the movement of security forces. The army had previously used the school building as a barracks. Though the children were all released by evening, they and their parents were terrified.

¶12. NGOs state that children who have left the Maoists and reported to "surrender camps" run by the army have been forced to return repeatedly to their villages to identify former comrades or to their units to report on movements, placing them in danger of retaliation by the insurgents. NGOs report that children have been beaten by military and police personnel during interrogation.

LONG-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

¶13. Child advocates agree that the psychological effects of the insurgency, while not yet fully assessed, are severe. "The violence they witness has resulted in thousands of children being psychologically traumatized," said CWIN's Pradhan. "They are becoming negative, erratic and more inhuman. They seem to be losing the ability to judge between right and wrong."

¶14. INSEC's Pyakurel agreed with the assessment. "The behavior of children is changing in the rural areas," he said upon his return from a trip to Maoist-affected areas. "When we met children, they asked for guns. When I asked why they wanted the guns, some said they wanted to kill the Maoists and some said they wanted to kill the police. They were all motivated by revenge."

¶15. Child welfare workers have reported that children who used to be frightened by the sight of dead bodies or wounded people seem to no longer notice them. Interviewed children readily admit that they live in constant fear, and most can cite examples of torture and killing in their villages. Most children cannot articulate plans or aspirations for the future, and the few interviewed children who could identify an ambition universally chose careers related to the insurgency--the police or army.

¶16. NGOs are concerned that exposure to the conflict has made violence a tolerable option for children, and that they are beginning to see it as the preferable or only way to solve problems. "The ongoing conflict has paved the way for a violent culture in the psyche of children," warned Pradhan. "If we are unable to rescue the children from violence, the new generation will be even more violent."

HEALTH ALSO AFFECTED

¶17. Less direct effects of the insurgency will also continue to be felt long into the future. In many places, drinking water systems, health posts, public communication and service centers have been destroyed. Nutrition programs have been cancelled as a result of security concerns, depriving some children of their only certain meal. Government healthcare workers have been threatened, attacked and abducted in Maoist-affected areas, and most are reluctant to return to carry out biannual immunization programs. USAID-supplied vitamin A capsules, vital for assisting in the development of childhood immune systems, have gone undistributed in villages in many districts. Polio, which was declared eradicated in 2000, has resurfaced in isolated cases.

SECURITY FORCES ADD TO TENSION

¶18. It is important to note that children have been victimized by both sides of the conflict. The Maoist insurgents routinely abuse the rights and neutrality of children through terrorism and intimidation. Government forces also appear guilty for abusing children. Statistics compiled by INSEC indicate that 63 of the 110 confirmed killings of minors were carried out by security forces. Though some of those killed were very likely child combatants fighting for the insurgency, children interviewed by NGOs have related incidents of torture, imprisonment and terrorism at the hands of security forces. The number of children killed or victimized by the Maoists, of course, is much harder to quantify.

¶19. According to one NGO study, fourteen-year-old Madhav Chaugali was regularly beaten by police trying to find his father, a suspected Maoist. In Bajani, in Kailali district, villagers report that three students were arrested by the army. Though two were returned two months later, the family of the third has had no word of her welfare or whereabouts. Also in Bajani, villagers related an incident in which police killed eight members of one family who had a Maoist hiding in their home. The children of the family were spared, but orphaned.

¶20. Several villages have reported that security forces harass children above age fourteen, demanding to be told who and where the Maoists are. The same villages also report that the security forces sometimes have physically abused

children as a tool of interrogation. In Fulbari, Kailali district, the army reportedly gathered the entire village in one place, including children older than fifteen, and threatened to kill them all if they would not provide information about the Maoists.

RESPONSE BY HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

¶21. Kathmandu-based NGOs have been calling for the government and human rights organizations to work together to protect children's rights and to assist children affected by the violence. The task is overwhelming. NGO rehabilitation centers for children--intended to assist trafficking victims or child laborers--have been overloaded by victims of the insurgency. CWIN's drop-in centers, transit centers, help lines and outreach programs are operating at full capacity in Kathmandu. According to Pradhan, however, the 300 children living in CWIN's rehabilitation homes are "barely scratching the surface of the problem."

¶22. INSEC's Pyakurel says that his organization's programs in rural areas cannot keep up with demand for health services and building programs and that his workers have been urging the Maoists not to attack school buildings and public facilities. Other NGOs are just now developing programs to assist orphans in cities outside Kathmandu.

¶23. Though activists are optimistic that assistance programs can alleviate some of the immediate suffering of children caught up in the conflict, the longer view is more ominous. "Children are supposed to be regarded as a source of hope and inspiration," CWIN President Pradhan lamented. "But with all of the problems they're growing up with, and the effect on their development... It's depressing instead."

COMMENT

¶24. Despite the grievous impact of the insurgency on the children of Nepal, few political parties--or foreign governments besides the US and UK--are speaking out on what should be an issue of universal condemnation. Aside from the terrible details of individual stories, leaders' attention should be captured by the fact that effects of the ongoing insurgency will be felt by the current generation of children long into their adulthood. As today's children grow into tomorrow's leaders, the fear and insecurity of the insurgency may well determine the nation's ability to craft a lasting peace. Education of many children has been interrupted, perhaps terminally (septel). Rebuilding the schools and public facilities destroyed by the Maoists will take years, and will cost the Government of Nepal millions of rupees. Rebuilding the shattered psychological state of Nepali children is a task without a clear end, but one that is vital if the next generation of leadership is going to have a chance at governing justly, and of leaving behind the motivation of revenge.

MALINOWSKI